

# African leaders pledge to drive routine immunisation and polio eradication

The African continent has made significant progress in its decades-long fight against polio, a life-threatening and vaccine-preventable disease caused by the poliovirus.



Source: [Polio Eradication Initiative](#).

Over the past decade, the African health community has worked towards increasing the number of children receiving vaccines, resulting in increased immunisation rates across the continent.

In 2019, basic immunisation coverage in Africa reached 76%, an impressive increase from 9% in 1980 and 56% in 2020.

Further, in 2020, the African region of the World Health Organization was certified as free of wild polio. Although a grand milestone, this only lasted two years and variant outbreaks continue to spread in communities that have low-vaccination rates.

Despite great strides towards a polio-free Africa, latest figures from WHO/Unicef Estimates of National Immunization Coverage (WEUNIC) show that vaccination rates have substantially declined, and the continent is seeing the lowest coverage since 2013. The reason for this decline can be attributed to disruptions in delivery of routine immunisation services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In response to the situation, former African Union chair and president of Senegal, Macky Sall, organised the Forum for Immunization and Polio Eradication in Africa on 10 December, 2022, in Dakar.

## A vision of universal immunisation

One of the main goals of the forum was to remobilise heads of State on the Addis Declaration on Immunization, a historic pledge adopted in 2017 to ensure that every person in Africa receives routine vaccinations to achieve universal immunisation on the continent.

Further, the forum called on civil society organisations, financial and technical partners, and African health experts to mobilise and advocate for universal vaccination access for all Africans, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised populations.



### SA measles outbreak of concern, NICD warns as case surge hits 80% worldwide

Katja Hamilton 13 Jan 2023



On the occasion of this forum, Sall said, "It must be said loud and clear that immunisation is a safe intervention. From their conception to the first injection, vaccines follow a rigorous and standardised scientific protocol that leaves no room for chance.

"Immunisation saves lives, especially those of women and children, who are in many ways vulnerable groups in society. Immunisation is effective. It prevents human suffering and disabilities, and helps to build strong immune systems in children.

## The right to health

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization said, "The right to health includes the right to vaccines. We must ensure that routine immunisation services guarantee equitable access to all children wherever they live.

"Concerted regional and global action to expand access to life-saving vaccines will enable us to protect against multiple and concurrent outbreaks of diseases such as polio, measles, yellow fever, cholera, and diphtheria. This will save lives, prevent disease and help us better prepare for future crises."

The forum emphasised the need for an increase in political and financial investments in immunisation programmes and services. The key institutions present, including WHO, Unicef, Gavi, Africa CDC, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Dakar Pasteur Institute, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and Rotary International reiterated the important role of civil society organisations (CSOs).

Through a joint CSO statement in support of the Addis Declaration, close to 200 African civil society organisations pledged to tackle the gap in immunisation and work together to address polio outbreaks. Similar to CSOs, the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD) founded in 2002 by 37 African First Ladies pledged their support for the remobilisation to fulfill the commitments made in the Addis Declaration.